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AUTHOR Sealander, Karen; Medina, Catherine; Gamble, Armanda; Pettigrew, Bobbie; Snyder, Maria; White, Sherri; Begay, Mary Helen; Bradley, Brian; Bradley-Wilkinson, Evangeline; Heimbecker, Connie; McCarty, Nellie; Nelson, Bernita; Nelson, Jacob; Smith, Jody; Whitehair, Marsha; Redsteer, Denise; Prater, Greg

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ABSTRACT

Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD) is located in the Navajo Reservation in Arizona. In addition to serving over 2,600 K-12 students, KUSD collaborates with the Navajo Nation and the Kayenta community to provide three early childhood education programs: Acceptance Belonging Caring (ABC) preschool, Navajo Nation Head Start, and Child Care Occupational Parenting Education Center (COPE). Program staff, support facilitators, and parents completed short surveys about the three programs, including provision of special education services. ABC and Head Start shared many similarities and differed from COPE in various ways. ABC and Head Start enrolled children aged 3-5, offered special education intervention services, and advocated a fully inclusive environment. COPE, on the other hand, provided child care vocational training for high school students and extended child care services to all community members, including free services to teen parents attending school. COPE did not offer special education services but made referrals to ABC and Head Start. All three programs incorporated Navajo language and culture, and parents and staff unanimously stated that the programs were successful. (SV)

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Karen Sealander
Catherine Medina
Armanda Gamble
Bobbie Pettigrew
Maria Snyder
Sherri White
Mary Helen Begay
Brian Bradley
Evangeline Bradley-Wilkinson
Connie Heimbecker
Nellie McCarty
Bernita Nelson
Jacob Nelson
Jody Smith
Marsha Whitehair
Denise Redsteer
Greg Prater

Northern Arizona University
Center for Excellence in Education
PO Box 5774
Flagstaff, Arizona
86011

EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION PARTNERSHIPS ON THE NAVAJO RESERVATION WITH AN EMPHASIS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

Introduction

Kayenta, Arizona is home to the Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD). The Navajo people refer to the town as "Todaneezhai" (spouting water). Kayenta is situated on the northeastern part of the State of Arizona. It comprises a populace of 6,500 residents. The township is located in the interior of the Navajo Nation, which covers 24,000 square miles and is the largest Native American reservation within the United States. Kayenta's locale is surrounded by some of nature's greatest natural wonders and it is known for its many tourist attractions. Monument Valley with its spectacular monolith formations lies about 23 miles north of Kayenta. About 30 miles west of Kayenta is Betatakin, where an ancient Anasazi ruin can be viewed. Canyon de Chelly, one of Navajoland's most popular all-day adventures, is located about 65 miles southeast of Kayenta. There are several other unique formations of rock and hills that present a very scenic flavor to the vicinity of Kayenta. There is also an abundance of desert wildlife and domesticated animals that can be seen roaming the rural flatlands surrounding Kayenta.

The Kayenta Unified School District includes schools which offer instruction at the Primary level (Kindergarten to grade two), Intermediate level (grades three to five), Middle level (grades six to eight), and High School level (grades nine to twelve). The District serves 2,626 students, and draws from an area of 3,000 square miles. It is not rare for some KUSD students to travel by bus for four hours a day over dirt and rough roads. A KUSD home language survey indicates that Navajo is the primary language spoken in 92% of student homes, although students may not be completely fluent in English or Navajo. Two hundred and twenty-three students are enrolled in the Special Education program in the KUSD.

In addition to providing instruction to school age students, KUSD through a cooperative venture between the District and Northern Arizona University's Center for Excellence in Education (NAU-CEE) provides training for students who want to become teachers. The joint project called the Reaching American Indian Special/Elementary Educators (RAISE) program is dedicated to providing education leading to a bachelor's degree in elementary and special education and is funded by a grant from the Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS). The program is delivered to cohorts of students in their local communities who spend one and one-half years together (Sealander, Eigenberger, Peterson, Shellady, and Prater, in press). RAISE

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has been described as a program transported to the reservation. This *transporting* enables local participants to complete a degree program while remaining with their families, retaining their jobs, and sustaining their support networks (Heimbecker, Minner, & Prater, 2000).

Purpose

The purpose of this presentation is to inform interested individuals about the collaboration existing between the KUSD, Navajo Nation, and the Kayenta community, with regards to Early Childhood Education programs. These collaborative efforts provide Early Childhood Education (ECE) through the following three programs: Acceptance Belonging Caring (ABC) Preschool, Navajo Nation Department of Head Start (NNDOHS), and the Child Care Occupational Parenting Education Center (COPE). Each of these unique programs offer and provide services that differ slightly. Initially information will be provided about the similarities and differences that exist between the three programs. Secondarily, we will provide a description of each organization's program, origins, purpose, funding, criteria for eligibility, special needs services, and so forth.

Methods

Research was conducted primarily through questionnaires, and secondarily through review of relevant documents. In addition, the researchers shared their professional experience and expertise working with two of the three programs described. Three different questionnaires were developed to target three different parties involved with the three selected programs. The first questionnaire targeted parents of regular and special needs children who utilize the ABC, NNDOHS and COPE programs. The second questionnaire targeted staff employed by these organizations, including certified teachers, educational specialists (Speech Therapists and Physical Therapists), and educational assistants. The third questionnaire targeted program administrators (the Vocational Education Director for KUSD who is involved with COPE, and the Itinerant Special Education Provider for KUSD who is involved with Head Start and ABC). Approximately 141 questionnaires were distributed in total, and approximately 46 were completed either independently, via telephone or through face to face interaction.

Survey questions focused on the three main objectives of the research. These objectives helped when categorizing responses of surveyed parents, support facilitators and administrators. Administrators were asked about the history, funding, enrollment, benefits, and success of their respective programs. Parents were asked how a particular ECE program helped address their child's needs, and how they felt about bilingual education and inclusion being incorporated into their child's ECE programs. Questions asked of the support facilitators focused on the profile of services offered by the ABC Preschool, Head Start and COPE programs. Facilitators were asked how these three programs worked cooperatively within the district to provide the local community with a collaborative effort by parents, educators and support facilitators. Finally we asked the support facilitators how bilingual education (i.e. including Navajo language and culture into programs) might help a child with a disability.

Survey Questions

The Vocational Education Director for KUSD involved with COPE, and the Itinerant Special Education Provider for KUSD involved in Head Start and ABC, were asked the following questions:

1. What is the C.O.P.E/Head Start/ABC program?
2. How was C.O.P.E/Head Start/ABC created?
3. When was it created?
4. What is its primary purpose?
5. How is it funded? Federal, State, Navajo Nation?
6. Who can enroll in the program?
7. What are the criteria?
8. Does the program serve any special needs? If so, how are the special needs served?
9. Does the program stress early education with an emphasis on special education?
10. Does this program help the local community? If so in what ways does it help?
11. Is bilingual education involved? If so, do you think it is beneficial? How does it apply to special needs?
12. Are referrals made from other places? If so, where, who?
13. Has the program been successful?

14. What recommendations would you suggest for improvement or otherwise?

ABC, Head Start and COPE support facilitators were asked:

1. What services are you able to provide and/or offer at the ABC Program, COPE and/or Head Start Program?
2. How are you able to involve the parents, the community, and the teaching staff in implementing services to be received by the child with the disability?
3. In an overview of the ABC Program, COPE, and/or the Head Start Program, how are services rendered to children with disabilities?
4. In an overview of the program(s) mentioned, discuss the unique qualities that the program provides to the community in a cooperative effort with parents, educators, and other support facilitators.
5. What types of special equipment are utilized with the different programs?
6. Being in a rural area, do you use alternative methods in assisting a child with Special Needs?
7. What is your expertise?
8. What is the referral procedure for a child with special needs. Is a referral made prior to services rendered?
9. Are referral procedures different with each individual program? How?
10. It has been mentioned that there is more focus geared towards implementing the Navajo language and culture into these programs, if so, how is it done?
11. How does bilingual education help a child with a disability?

Questions directed towards parents included:

1. What services have been provided to you and your child through the Head Start, ABC Preschool, and/or COPE program?
2. Do you feel that in receiving the services mentioned above your child has grown in a positive manner? If so, how and what do you see?
3. What recommendations would you make in helping to improve the program services?
4. Has the program been beneficial to your child? If so, please explain.
5. How do you feel about inclusion?
6. How do you feel about the implementation of Bilingual education into these?

Results

General Findings:

Preliminary findings suggest that while Head Start and ABC share many similarities, they are different from COPE in a variety of ways. Unlike COPE, the majority of support facilitators from Head Start and ABC stated that the primary purpose of their program is to provide quality care and special education intervention services to eligible children within the KUSD boundaries. Again unlike COPE, the majority of the parents with children at Head Start and ABC responded that the purpose of their child's program was to provide services that addressed the special needs of their children (special programs and equipment, individualized attention, instruction of basic skills, etc.). In contrast, the COPE Center employees responded that they do not serve special needs children because they are not equipped for this. With the help of Child Find (a community advertisement for special needs screening of children between 0-21 months) COPE does make special needs referrals to either ABC or Head Start.

While the age of enrollment for children with the COPE program stemmed from 6 weeks old to 3 years old, ABC Preschool and Head Start both enroll children from only 3 to 5 years old. Respondents from both ABC and Head Start stated that they offer services to all eligible special needs students, and advocate a fully inclusive environment. Both ABC and Head Start evaluate children through a Child Find screening or by referrals. Both organizations described a similar referral process including: 1) a 45 Day Screening Instrument completed by classroom teachers 2) referrals made by teachers, parents or students themselves, and 3) Child Study Teams (problem solving groups) which convene to explore options and suggest behavioral strategies.

In contrast to the differences documented above, respondents from all three programs stated that they have similar funding sources (state, federal and the Navajo Nation). Again however, COPE differed slightly in that this organization also receives some tuition funds from parents who use the center. In addition, respondents (parents and

employees) from all three organizations unanimously stated that their programs were successful and provided much needed quality services to Kayenta and the Navajo Nation.

Program Descriptions:

Respondents involved with the ABC Preschool described this program as a fully inclusive program that is operated under the Special Education Department of the KUSD. The ABC Preschool offers intervention services for children with severe disabilities and/or developmental delays. Students use varied special equipment including standees, wheelchairs, nebulizers, suction machines, walkers, tube feeding devices, and braces. The ABC program uses a developmental curriculum that is modified to meet the needs of all students. The ABC preschool creates opportunities and experiences that benefit both students with disabilities, and their non-disabled peers. The program accepts referrals from the Indian Children's Program through Northern Arizona University's Institute for Human Development, Arizona Early Intervention Program (AZEIP), Division of Developmental Disability, Growing In Beauty, and the local Child Find.

ABC Preschool was created out of the Adaptive Learning Center (ALC) which offers services to students with a variety of disabilities. While children enrolled in ALC had no opportunity to interact with "typical" children from preschool age through second grade, the ABC program was created in 1989 as part of the Full Inclusion Initiative instituted by Dr. Dennis Bissmeyer, former KUSD Special Education Director. Any child 3-5 years can enroll in the ABC program if they have been 1) identified through Child Find as having a disability or severe developmental delay or 2) served by an Early Intervention Program. In addition, every year the program accepts five "regular" students who will interact positively with the special needs students. The "regular" students' names are drawn from a lottery, and each child must be four years old, by September 1st of that school year.

The ABC program helps the local community by providing opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's classroom. It also offers special needs employment and training for staff. Encouraging "regular" students to interact with special needs students benefits both groups of students and helps the local community to be more aware and accepting of individuals with disabilities.

Recently, students in ABC began learning basic concepts for kindergarten readiness in both Navajo and English. As one Itinerant Special Educator suggested, "Bilingual [education] expands the pathways in the brain and strengthens cognitive abilities. Children with special needs benefit from exposure to songs in any language."

The Navajo Nation Department of Head Start program provides ECE services to both regular children and those with only mild disabilities (primarily speech challenges). The Kayenta Unified School District works in conjunction with the NNDOHS, and provides five classrooms at the KUSD Primary School. Head Start makes referrals to the ABC Preschool if a child's needs cannot be met under the Head Start program. This Head Start program provides comprehensive services intended to strengthen family dynamics and help children develop to their fullest potential. Federal funds for Head Start are allocated to the Navajo Nation, which distributes the money to various agencies.

Head Start was established in 1965 to provide low-income children with the opportunity to build a foundation of intellectual and social development before entering kindergarten. The program came to the Navajo Nation in 1965. The program benefits the community by providing much needed services to low-income families and families of children with mild disabilities. The Federal Family Poverty Income Guidelines are still used to determine eligibility, and the program is intended to help address poverty. Families receiving public assistance or having children in foster care are eligible. Children in Head Start are entitled to all programs and services for which they are eligible, based on an evaluating team's decision. If a student's needs exceed Head Start's capabilities, a referral is made to ABC Preschool. Child Find also makes occasional referrals. A KUSD Itinerant special education teacher is assigned to all Head Start sites located within the KUSD area (Navajo Nation, 2000).

In 1991 the Navajo Head Start Program fully merged under the Navajo Tribe, and the program is currently operating as a department under the Navajo Nation Division of Education. In the fall of 1995 an Executive Order was signed by President Albert Hale, mandating that the Navajo Language be used as the language of instruction at all Navajo Nation Head Start facilities (Navajo Nation, 1995). In summary, the Head Start program has been, and continues to be, successful.

The Child Care Occupational Parenting Education Center was established in 1988 by a group of educators and parents who saw the need for such a center. These parents and educators applied for grants, received funding, and initiated the program. The COPE Center provides quality child care to teenage mothers who are attending high school. In addition, the program also provides child care for district employees and community members.

The COPE program educates students who are in the High School via the Occupational Child Care (OCC) vocational program. Students enrolled in the program learn the occupation of a Child Care Worker. In addition, students who have a child and attend the High School are trained on parenting skills. Children enrolled in the center learn songs, play together, and are taught early education skills

The Center receives funding from federal and state governments via students who are in the Occupational Child Care (OCC) vocational program. Additional funds are secured through Department of Economic Securities, which provides money for children's daily meals. Navajo Nation provides funds for those children who qualify for assistance in Child Care. Teachers and community members make child care tuition payments. Teenage mothers who attend the KUSD High School and utilize the center for their infants, are funded in part by the Vocational Education Department within the KUSD.

Enrollment into the COPE Program is available to any child between the ages of one month and three years. The State of Arizona requires that COPE provide child care for children only up to three years of age. As mentioned, COPE does not serve special needs students because it is not adequately equipped. When the Center was first built, special needs services were not included in the Center's grants and funds.

The COPE program helps the community by providing extended child care to all people. The Center is regularly inspected for compliance in areas such as safety, ratio of staff vs. children, nutrition, and regulations for Arizona Child Care Centers. The Child Care Occupational Parenting Education Center is viewed as one of the best childcare facilities in the area. Center staff incorporates weekly lesson plans for children, and those attending are involved in a number of early education activities. The center includes a bilingual education component. Many parents request that their child be spoken to in Navajo, and Center staff is fluent in Navajo. Cradleboards (a traditional Navajo instrument used to safely secure very young children) are available for those who wish to use them.

Conclusion

Early Childhood Education, especially in a rural area such as Kayenta, has its difficulties and challenges. However, our findings show that ABC Preschool, Head Start and COPE work cooperatively to provide quality services for every child who enrolls in their programs. These organizations share information and incorporate Navajo culture into their programs. Together these organizations make the best possible effort to help a child learn to their fullest potential. ABC Preschool and Head Start work collaboratively to ensure that all special needs referrals are made, and that the needs of children with disabilities are met within their organizations. While the COPE program does not provide special needs services, it does work with KUSD and the community to provide much needed "regular" child care services. COPE employees are informed in the area of special education, and are able to assist families with referral information when the need arises.

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